

SWAMI

AKHANDANANDA SARASWATI

The Substance of Piety or Sacred Duty



THE Atman without a second whose nature is Existence-Knowledge-Bliss or *Sacchidananda* is the fountain-head of Piety or Sacred Duty; for the *Upanishads* declare that there is no other substance at all. Therefore Piety is undoubtedly the means of spirituality and in the life of the realised souls or the emancipated souls it continues to remain as a dominant character. Let us take each of these aspects separately and ponder over them so that we may get to know what they mean.

Self or Atman is Existence

This implies that the *Atman* or the Self has been, is and will ever be. It has never died, nor is it dying, nor will it ever die at all. From this we derive the conclusion that we do not die nor should we kill; surely we should neither fear death nor frighten others about death. It also implies that we must practise fearlessness and favour others with freedom from fear. This then is the first result of the knowledge of the Self-awareness.

The second corollary of the knowledge of Self-Realisation is that we have been living, we continue to live and we shall live for ever. Till now, if death had touched us, we would not be living. Living is natural but death is accidental or imaginary. What lesson does this indicate in respect of Piety or Sacred Duty? It is summed up in the aphorism—Live and let others live too. That means everyone with whom our Self is associated should obtain food, clothing, shelter and medicine. It implies also that effort should be made to provide

means of sustenance for the able-bodied and provision of livelihood for those who are disabled in society. Another important offshoot of this is that arrangements should be made to maintain and protect such as are engaged in contemplation, in seeking knowledge and peace.

Atma is chit swarupa of the nature of Awareness and as such its inherent nature is to know or experience

This also means that it is not of the nature of nescience or *Ajnana*. Even after the recession of senses and mentations, it illuminates the states of trance, swoon and sleep. If the *Atman* had not the capacity inherently to know, then the very state which we designate as 'deep sleep' would not have been understood by any one. Even the knowledge, 'I am ignorant' is also being apprehended by *Atman*. The Self has no connection with nescience. What conclusion can we draw from this: we should not remain ignorant nor should we mislead others or mystify others. It becomes unrighteous to remain ignorant and to indulge in cheating or duping or taking advantage of another's ignorance. This is the consequence of our partaking of the nature of awareness or ultimate consciousness.

Another corollary arising from this aspect namely that we are of the nature of Awareness is that, as mind identified with the individuality we know, keep on knowing and desire to know more and more. From this the conclusion we draw for Piety or Sacred Duty is that we should keep on increasing our knowledge and also encourage promotion of knowledge in

others. Therefore it is our duty to acquire complete clarity about our own knowledge so that we may impart it clearly to others. Even birds and animals impart to the young some knowledge they have. This indicates then that education, research, university publications, libraries, philosophical expositions, seminars and all other arrangements meant to impart knowledge form the sacred duty of persons. Laboratories or research bodies should be brought into being; study of the revelations of the past, of modern trends and situations and planning for the future equally form part of one's sacred duty. Biology, sociology and politics too are included herein.

In addition Truth which is undifferentiated, formless and immaculate has to be investigated and known. By such study the intellect gets rid of its one-sidedness. Man's life does not become balanced unless he acquires analytical and specialised knowledge, common or general knowledge and synthetic or unified knowledge. Specialised subjects may be learned anywhere but the acquisition of the knowledge of that undifferentiated ultimate Truth can be got only from dispassionate and philosophical saints only. The making of suitable arrangements for such things is also a part of our sacred duty. Knowledge is either *Adhyatmic* or what relates to things that are within the body; it may be *Aadhidaivik* or what concerns itself with the forces that are working in this universe or it may be *Aadhibhautik* or what relates to the world of matter and material things. But

different from all these is the knowledge of the *Non-dual Brahman* or *Paramarthajnana*. Since the self is of the nature of knowledge it is necessary that every arrangement and facility should be provided for the acquisition of this knowledge.

Self is of the nature of Bliss

This fact is proved by our abundant and unfading love for ourselves. All things have an end; *Atman* is the end point or perceiver of end. We do not like misery or desire it. Sorrow is a foreign thing to our nature and man makes an all-out effort to remove it just as the body makes all effort to get rid of any foreign body such as a thorn that has got into it or dust particles that have got lodged in the eyes. From this the lesson for Piety or Sacred Duty that we can draw is that at no time or in no place should we from any cause whatsoever be unhappy nor wake up in others the consciousness of being unhappy. That I am unhappy or that another is unhappy is a false knowledge that results from the superimposition of some external and totally unrelated substance on the Self. Therefore, becoming unhappy or making others unhappy are both unrighteous and contrary to our nature of being blissful. Such is the first consequence of the Self's blissful nature on the life of righteousness.

The second of the sacred duties that derive from this fact of our nature that we are blissful is that we should always, at all places and in every possible way be happy and try to make others happy. We desire to be happy,

so do all. In whatever mode you obtain happiness, do remain happy—be it through knowledge, through meditation, through rest or recreation, through the Love of the Lord, through the practice of virtue, through dance and song, through singing or playing on the instruments, through play-acting or staging plays, through renunciation, or through gathering things. It is necessary that man should obtain happiness. Obtaining happiness is Dharma and making others happy is equally our Sacred Duty. However such obtaining of happiness acquires the greatest distinction when it is always carried out, when it is effortlessly done, when it is done without causing any kind, however slight, of misery to another, and when it is pervasive and absolutely independent of another. Happiness acquires the qualities of stability or permanence and subtleness when there is a close and yet closer proximity of the Self to happiness and the means of obtaining happiness. Or in other words as long as happiness and the means of obtaining it are more and more intimately connected with the Self, to that extent the happiness becomes stable and subtle. The modes of acquisition of happiness by each group of people should be unquestioningly accepted and they should be permitted to obtain happiness in their own ways. There is no justification for causing any obstruction to these modes. For all things, be it an idea, an emotion, an action, an effort or relation, are good in themselves. Bliss is our very nature and so when our mind envelopes any thing it imparts to it the

quality of bliss. Every creature whether it belongs to the insect species or the winged tribe, has its own happiness and it is not right for us to cause any obstruction to these enjoying their own happiness.

Self is non-dual

From this the lesson that emerges is that perpetuation of differences and the creation of differences is a result of an illusion based on ignorance. It is this ignorance that is the father of such polarities as mine—theirs; high—low; foe—friend; attachment—hatred; and its cause dislike and conflict; quarrels and war. It is again the slavery to this duality that makes man, disregarding true knowledge, to raise such questions as tradition and modernity. Drawing up false geographical boundaries they create provinces, nations, islands etc. and then indulge in quarrels and disputes over these. Communalism, class-conflict theory, provincialism and linguism—all these are the offshoots of this only. Self indeed is non-dual. It is one thing to accept an attitude of duality as a means towards the ultimate cessation of the false sense of duality but it is entirely another thing to perpetuate duality, misery, and foolishness. To be engrossed in this delusion of duality and to cause more and more misery or to instigate others for the

purpose is unrighteous. Hence the conclusion we can draw from the fact that Self is of the nature of bliss is that we should rid ourselves of the sense of duality and should also not cast others in it.

Another corollary of this fact is that there is nothing other than one's Self; that is to say, that everything is one's own. Just as we possess love and affection for things that belong to us or that partake of our nature and quality so too we should extend the same love and affection to things that might appear to belong not to us but to others. In our heart we must have love and sympathy for all and we should endeavour to enhance mutual understanding and unity in the bosoms of others. In this non-duality, ignorance, egotism, love, hatred, fear—all are discarded. The pragmatic result of this is that just as we dislike theft, injury etc. to our person and desire praise, honour etc., so too the others desire for the Self. God dwells in them. Since the Self is one, whatever we do unto others will also be done to us.

In this the general basis of common duties arising from the recognition of the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss nature of the Self has been expounded and we might end by pointing out that the same principle can also be the basis for special sacred duties. □ □ □

Self-respect is the noblest garment with which a man may clothe himself—the most elevating feeling with which the mind can be inspired. One of Pythagoras's wisest maxims is that in which he enjoins the pupil to "reverence himself."